



# Faith at Home

Welcome to Faith at Home, our monthly resource for those seeking to develop children's faith at home. We know that raising the next generation of Jesus-followers isn't easy, but hopefully the ideas and stories inside these pages can help us all along the way. You could tear out these pages to give to parents you work with or point them in the direction of [youthandchildrens.work/faithathome](http://youthandchildrens.work/faithathome), where it's available to download for free (and won't hurt your beautiful magazine).

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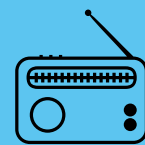
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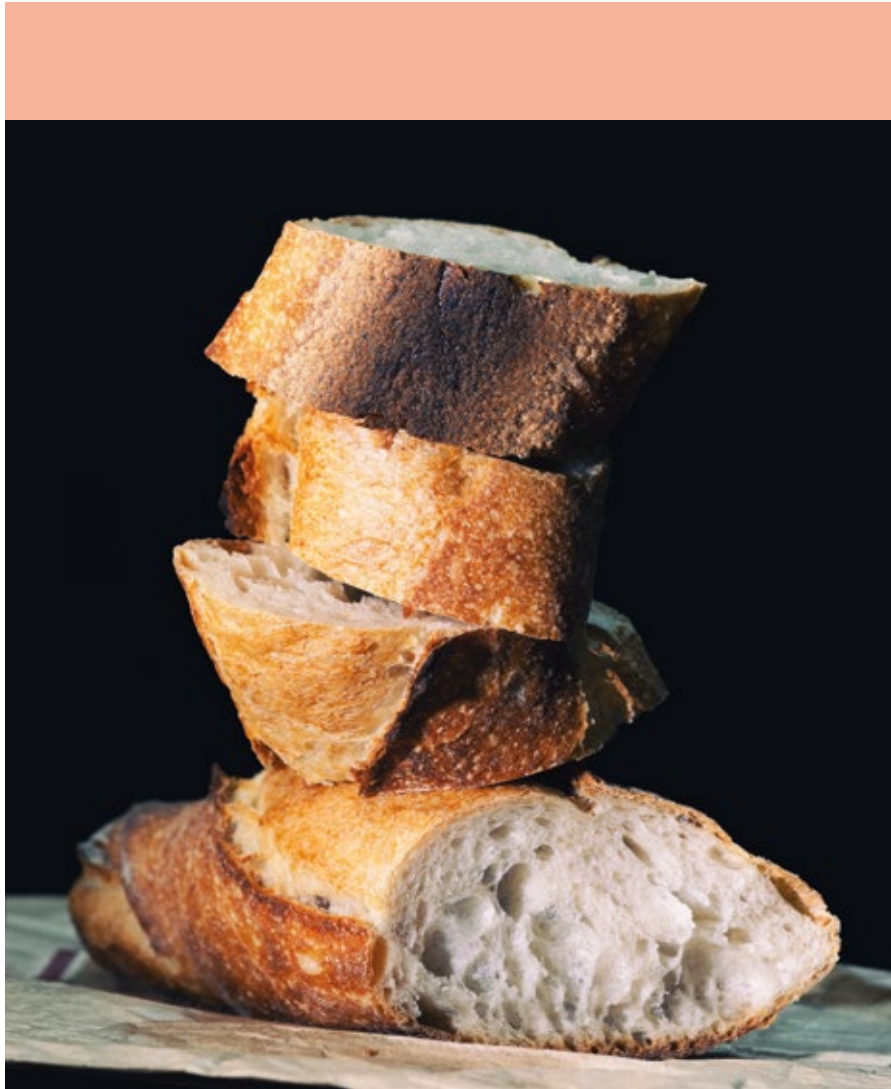
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# Sharing our kitchen table

Krish Kandiah explores how we can practise radical hospitality and encourage our children to do likewise





I was sitting at the dinner table, and although I was physically present I was a million miles away. Things were kicking off at work; a major dispute had led to more than a dozen staff leaving the organisation. On top of that, I had just found out that my mother was dying of cancer. Church was proving difficult as my work colleagues attended with me. My sleep was disrupted and I lost interest in food because I couldn't switch off from all the turmoil. I was not taking things well. I felt betrayed by the Church, by fellow Christians, by the whole machinery behind Christian ministry and even by God.

I was also disappointed in myself. I should have had enough resources to cope with this. I had always believed that the God of the gospel was big enough to handle any problems we might face. And I thought I was pretty clued up when it came to understanding struggles. I had been mentored by youth workers, trained by Christian university campus workers, apprenticed by church leaders and had even invested in theological education. I had a CV that included missionary, pastor and lecturer at a prestigious university. I had even written books. But all of this proved inadequate for handling what I was facing.

I always remember that dark period of my life when I hear otherwise shocking stories of the faith struggles of prominent Christian leaders. The recent public faith deconstructions of pastor Joshua Harris and Hillsong's Marty Sampson may have reflected mine: let down on too many fronts at the same time, with a theology that seems to have answers to tragedy and disappointment but can't really stand the rigour of circumstances beyond our control.



## New life

The game changer for me was that in the middle of the lowest point in my life our family became foster parents. We already had three children aged 7, 6 and 5, and had just finished the necessarily invasive fostering assessment process. Suddenly, we received the call for our first placement: a newborn baby girl.

That little girl lived with us as our foster daughter for two years before we finally adopted her. As I nourished and nurtured her, she brought me back to life. On 11<sup>th</sup> September, her status in our family became legal and permanent. It is a date that brings to mind the worst atrocities mankind can wreak against one another. But for me that courtroom date will always signify one of the highlights of my life. Perhaps it shines even more brightly because of the darkness that surrounded it: the darkness of 9/11 and of terrorism wherever it occurs; the darkness of a world where workplace bullying is allowed to continue unchecked; the darkness of a world full of cancer, mental health crises and children legally removed from parents who had not been protected themselves when they were young.



*The most important place when it comes to following Christ is the kitchen table*

I never did rediscover my relationship with God. I say that because I encountered a whole new relationship with him. The developing relationship with my adopted daughter opened my eyes to the truth that God was my adoptive father, and that I was his adopted child. To be honest, it still surprises me how much this revolutionised my faith. But in researching my two latest books I have discovered that this link is plainly written throughout the pages of our Bibles.

I thought I understood the Bible pretty well – I lectured in theology around the world! But the experience of welcoming someone else's child into our family opened my eyes to an essential aspect of Christian discipleship I had previously failed to notice. Whether you start with the story of Abraham inadvertently welcoming God into his tent for dinner, or with Jesus visiting Zacchaeus' house, or with the kingdom of heaven being likened to a feast that was rejected by the establishment and offered to outsiders, or with Jesus' explanation of the final Judgement Day in Matthew 25 swinging on whether we welcomed the hungry, the thirsty, the sick and the stranger, it's hard to avoid the simple and scary truth that hospitality is an essential part of Christian discipleship.

This is repeatedly illustrated in the worked-out examples of Naomi and Ruth, David and Mephibosheth, Pharaoh's daughter and baby Moses, John and Jesus' mother and countless others: invitation and inclusion, despite natural barriers. Somehow, I had missed it. I had reduced the gospel down to a set of propositions that needed to be believed about Jesus, sin, the cross and salvation. And by doing so I had managed to ignore most of what Jesus actually said and almost all of what he actually did for most of my Christian life.



## Move to the table

Too often we have made the study the most important room in the house of Christian discipleship. We assume that it's what you know that saves you, it's what you believe that shapes you and it's what you say that defines you. But I have come to discover that, biblically, the most important place when it comes to following Christ is the kitchen table. Who do we let into our homes and hearts? Who do we share food with regularly? Who is offered a listening ear, sustenance, help, time and hope, with a bit of food and drink thrown in for good measure?

I am passionate about helping children and young people make this connection from desk to kitchen table, and about giving them a vision for the normality of radical hospitality that could save lives, maybe even their own.

## Teach about it

It's surprising how much of Jesus' most important work and conversations took place around food. Jesus' first miracle was providing wine at a wedding. His last meeting with his disciples before the cross was celebrating the Passover meal with them. His first visit with his disciples after the resurrection was when he barbecued fish for them after they had been fishing and caught nothing. Why not look at the life of Christ based around meals, and not only teach it but model the transformational power of hospitality? My book *God is Stranger* looks at some of the most difficult-to-understand Bible texts and shows how hospitality lies at the heart of them. Why not use this as a curriculum for your youth and children's groups, or discuss it together as a family around the kitchen table?



## “ *A child's life could be changed by an invitation to supper*”

### **Practise it**

When I was in sixth form, a youth worker challenged me to invite three of my friends over for a campfire barbecue, and to explain to them why I had become a Christian. It was out of my comfort zone. But while we were making s'mores I shared a little about my journey to faith. They were open to hearing about it, asked intelligent questions and – after a short evangelistic course – one of them became a Christian. I have loved being in churches where the young people have run their own Alpha courses: cooking food for their friends, doing the talks themselves and hosting tables. I have seen hospitality as a powerful opportunity for rich evangelistic dialogue and delicious conversation starters.

### **Welcome the stranger**

I was definitely an outsider at my school. I was the brownest boy there. I was relentlessly teased about being from Pakistan (I wasn't), my dad running a corner shop (he didn't) and my mother growing up in the jungle (she didn't). I was intrigued when one of my friends became a Christian and showed remarkable kindness and compassion toward me in my class. He often invited me to his home, where he shared his kitchen table with fostered and adopted siblings.

I couldn't articulate it then, but his home was a remarkable picture of the hospitality of God. His life and words brought me to faith in Jesus. In every classroom our children and young

people study in there will be children like me. Those that feel like outsiders. Those who need to know and feel unconditional love. Those whose lives could be changed by an invitation to supper. We need to release our young people to demonstrate and articulate the welcoming grace of God to them. And we need to open our homes and share our kitchen tables.

My life and faith were transformed after welcoming our tiny little guest into our home. I understood something more of grace, unconditional love, hope and relationship with a new father. It wasn't an instant fix, like some spiritual magic bullet. But it set me on a path from which I saw that practising the hospitality of God could make a real impact. It can open up something more of the riches of the Christian faith, give a deeper appreciation of the character of God and provide an immersive, life-transforming encounter with the mission of God. If our kitchen tables are among the simplest and best places for our Christian faith to find expression, we need to share this great secret with everyone.

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### **DR KRISH KANDIAH**

is a speaker, activist and author. His latest book *The Greatest Secret* explores the radical impact that fostering and adopting a little girl had on his life, faith and hope.

# Multimedia Bible exploration

**What springs to mind when you hear the word ‘multimedia’? Do you think of a video projector? Smoke and lights? Complex editing suites or mixing desks? In the art world, multimedia means the artist using more than one form of content in their work, for example clay in a painting or music with a sculpture. Wikipedia puts it this way: “Multimedia is content that uses a combination of different content forms such as text, audio, images, animations, video and interactive content.”**

A multimedia Bible exploration sounds far too complex for a parent to have time to organise at home. However, I’d like to propose that it isn’t, especially when we use resources others have already made.

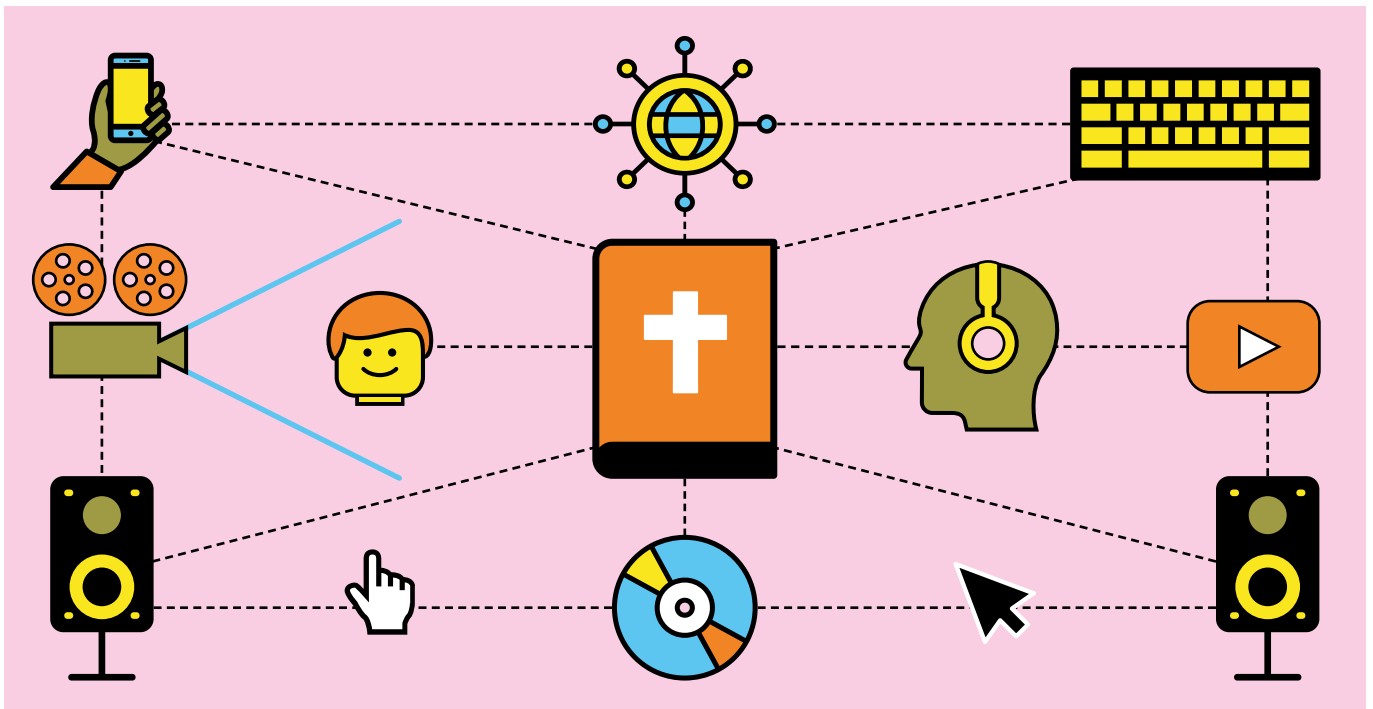
When helping people work out how to do faith at home, I’m always keen to work with them to find ways to make it work for their family (see my article in June’s issue). However, that doesn’t mean we’re looking for the one thing that will work, as we’re still talking about a family: a group of unique individuals, each on their own journey of faith and with their own preferred way of connecting with God. My solution for this is similar to when I’m planning something intergenerational in a church setting: variety!

Earlier this year I wanted us to focus on a psalm together, Psalm 121. I was keen for us to learn it, as I learnt lots of scripture as a child and have found it useful throughout my life. However, I wanted it not just to be learnt, but also meditated on and explored a bit. So this is what I did:

- I created a series of four playlists on YouTube (you could make use of the method you use to organise your music), each with two tracks: one with the psalm being read and one with the psalm being sung. I tried to stick to the NIV version, as I felt this would be an understandable version to remember and use in life. To be honest, one playlist would have been fine, but the four gave us a bit of variety. By changing the playlist each week we heard a different voice reading it, which helped us hear it

differently, as well as learning different songs taken from the psalm. (I tried to pick a wide variety of voices and songs so we could all find at least one we liked.)

- We listened to each playlist for one week, once a day, usually after breakfast while getting ready to go out, or during the first five minutes in the car (before we listened to the *Lego Movie 2* soundtrack. Again). I found that by doing this fairly consistently three to five days a week, my 6 and 8-year-olds learnt pretty much all the words of the psalm off by heart without even reading it themselves!
- In week one I set out a creative activity using squares of origami paper and giant Post-it notes to create collages. I wrote out the words of some of the verses to inspire our pictures. I find creating things like this gives me time to meditate on the words of a particular part of the psalm. Often the words I choose to collage are those that are resonating with me, so it gives me time to chat with God and think over what they mean, and to let them settle deeper in my heart. We each created one of these collages. I would have loved to make one for each verse but my daughters weren’t very keen, so I didn’t push it.
- I recently read that Psalms could well have been written while God’s people were in exile, and I can see how this psalm has a different meaning when it is read in that light. To explore this a little we watched a few videos from The Bible Project about the exile on YouTube. These are highly visual five-minute videos that explore different aspects of the Bible in a lot of detail and very quickly! Even my 6 and 8-year-old liked watching them, and they understood and remembered some of what we learnt there. It was great to watch them and learn together, modelling that we are never too old to learn more about the Bible or to discover more of the treasures God has placed within it for us.



- It may be a coincidence, but when I asked my children which Bible story they would like to listen to on *biblegateway.com* (you can listen to the whole Bible for free there!), they asked for Daniel and Jonah, both of which are based in a similar timeframe to when the psalm may have been written. As we listened they spotted overlapping themes in those stories. For example, Jonah prayed to God from inside the big fish. What did he pray? I wonder whether he prayed a prayer like Psalm 121? And later, when the Lord makes a plant grow up to shade Jonah from the sun, the Lord becomes his shade at his right hand, just as Psalm 121 describes.
- I spent three or four mornings exploring words from the psalm using a Hebrew Lexicon app on my phone to reflect on the wider meaning of the words. I discovered that in the short eight verses of this psalm, words stemming from the word *shamar* occur five times. It's a definite theme, so I looked up the meaning of the word and found that it means to protect, to care for, to preserve and to keep. It's the word that is used when it says: "The Lord watches over you" (verse 5), "The Lord will keep you from all harm; he watches over your life" (verse 7) and "The Lord will watch over your coming and going" (verse 8).

These are multimedia options that work for me and my family in the season we're in. They may not be ways that would work for your family, but I hope they give you some ideas of how you could use various resources to explore a Bible passage in different ways over a set period of time (such as a month).

We are more likely to get some traction with our ideas and resources if they are ones that tap into our own family's preferred styles of connecting with God. This might involve answering a few questions, so try asking yourself and then the others in your family the following:

- When you last felt connected with God, what was it that helped you connect?
- If you could only choose one aspect of church life to help you grow in your faith, what would it be? Sermons? Worship? Fellowship? Creative activities? Games? Quiet space? Opportunities to serve? Something else?

If your family doesn't want to chat over these questions, spend time watching and listening, then reflect on these questions:

- What are they into? What do they enjoy doing? What behavioural patterns can you spot? (For example, a child who likes to play with Sylvania families or Playmobil, or who makes Lego models to tell stories, is into small-world play. Therefore, they might engage well with telling and exploring Bible stories using small-world characters.)
- Which skills are they developing? What interests do they have?
- How do they like to connect with God and other people?

If you would like to read more about different ways in which people connect with God, I can recommend Carolyn Edwards excellent book *Slugs and Snails and Puppy Dogs' Tails*. It ostensibly looks like a book about boys and God, but in her research she discovered that the way we connect with God is more to do with our spiritual styles than with gender. It's well worth a read!

If you'd like to use Victoria's Psalm 121 playlists, you can find them on her website or on her Facebook page.

#### VICTORIA BEECH

runs GodVenture to inspire family faith at home. You can find lots more ideas for using different media in your faith at home activities on her website (*GodVenture.co.uk*) as well as on her Facebook and Instagram pages: @GodVenture.





Here is a story for you to tell at home, perhaps at bedtime or as part of a God time during the day. You could also use it as part of a children's session. To read some of Bob's other stories, download our **FREE** ebook at [youthandchildrens.work/stories](http://youthandchildrens.work/stories).



## Fair's fair



Long, long ago, before there were police or judges or laws, justice was pretty hard to find.

A man from Village A would hurt a man from Village B. *Divide your children into Village A and Village B, or choose whether you and your child are going to be Village A or B. Have everyone from Village B say: "Ow!"*

So a man from Village B would go and kill a man from Village A. *Village A says: "Ow!" a bit louder.*

Then a couple of men from Village A would kill ten men from Village B. *Village B says: "Ow!" louder still.*

So Village B would form an army and raze Village A to the ground. *Village A says: "Ow!" loudest of all.*

It wasn't really justice at all. It was just revenge. And it caused more and more damage as it went along.

So someone came up with an idea for justice. It's in the Old Testament part of the Bible, but you can find it in other places, too.

And the idea was: "An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth."

It still sounds pretty harsh, though, doesn't it?

If a man from Village A poked out the eye of a man from Village B (*Village B says: "Ow!" and points to their eye*), a man from Village B got to poke out the eye of a man from Village A in return. *Village A says: "Ow!" and points to their eye.*

But only one eye. Not two.

If a man from Village A knocked out the tooth of a man from Village B, (*Village B says: "Ow!" and points to their tooth*), a man from Village B got to knock out the tooth of a man from Village A in return. *Village A says: "Ow!" and points to their eye.*

But only one tooth. And no more.

It was still a kind of revenge, but it was meant to limit what you could do back to someone if they hurt you. *Only an eye for an eye. Only a tooth for a tooth.*

And then Jesus came along, and he had a completely different idea about justice altogether.

"You have heard the saying: 'An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth,'" he said to the people he was teaching.

"But here's what I say. Don't push back against the person who hurts you. If he hits you on the right cheek (*have everyone point to their right cheek*), turn your left cheek in his direction, too. *Have everyone point to their left cheek.*

It sounds a little crazy, and dangerous, too. But Jesus knew what he was doing. If someone hits you, part of what they are trying to prove is that they are more powerful than you; they are in charge. When you don't fight back, when you turn the other cheek, you show that you are in charge of the situation; you have made a choice not to fight. And you show them up for the bullies they are.

But that's not all that Jesus said.

"If someone sues you in a court of law and takes your shirt (*have everyone pretend to take off their shirt*), let him have your cloak as well." *Repeat action.*

Yeah, that's right. In those days, if someone took both your shirt and your cloak you'd pretty well be naked. But then people would look at the man who had taken your shirt and your cloak and would say what a greedy, evil person he was. And they would likely shame him into giving it back. It would make his evil clear to everyone without a fight!

And finally, Jesus told people that if someone forces you to go a mile (*have everyone make a walking motion*), go two miles, instead. *Repeat motion.*

Roman soldiers often did that to people, forcing them to carry stuff. They did it to show that they were more powerful than the people in the nations they ruled. Again, the action Jesus taught puts the person who is pushed around on an equal level with the person doing the pushing because he chooses, and is not *forced*, to go that second mile. And by returning kindness for harsh treatment he shows that there is a better way.

Hopefully, both Village A and Village B will keep all their eyes and teeth, and will discover that if you return something other than harm for harm you can challenge the other person to think about what they are doing. You will maybe even see them change, and potentially make a just world for everyone!

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### BOB HARTMAN

is an author and performance storyteller, who has spent many years writing and telling stories.